



A nonpartisan research and public policy office of the Connecticut General Assembly

Testimony of

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Aging Committee

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Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to comment on several bills before you today.

As you know, the Connecticut Commission on Aging is the nonpartisan state agency devoted to preparing Connecticut for a significantly changed demographic and enhancing the lives of the present and future generations of older adults. For seventeen years, the Commission has served as an effective leader in statewide efforts to promote choice, independence and dignity for Connecticut's older adults and persons with disabilities.

In these difficult budget times, research-based initiatives, statewide planning efforts, vision and creative thinking are all needed. The Connecticut Commission on Aging stands ready to assist our state in finding solutions to our fiscal problems, while keeping commitments to critical programs and services.

Senate Bill 24: An Act Concerning Hospital Admissions of Medicare Recipients

~CoA informs

CoA applauds the Committee's identification of this issue. As you know, Medicare will pay for up to 100 days in a skilled nursing facility after a stay of three days in a hospital. However, evidence is mounting that hospitals across the country now sometimes place patients under "observation status," instead of truly admitting them. To any patient or observer, "observation status" looks like a regular admission; there is no way to tell that the patient has not been admitted. They may be in a regular hospital room, be receiving intravenous medications, be attended to by hospital staff, et cetera. However, the result of observation status is that Medicare will not pay for certain services within the hospital, including prescription drugs – nor for needed follow-up care in a nursing home – leaving the patient to pay out-of-pocket.

The nationally-recognized Center for Medicare Advocacy has been collecting data on this issue. Their findings are that even patients who have been in hospitals for up to fourteen days have later discovered that they were not admitted, but were instead under observation. Some hospitals have retroactively reclassified patients' stays as outpatient observation.

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CoA has been informed that Congressman Courtney will introduce legislation to address this issue on the federal level. This bill's intent of gathering information could provide context to the federal discussion and should be supported.

Senate Bill 621: An Act Establishing a Revolving Loan Fund for Payment of Property Taxes for Elderly Homeowners

~CoA informs

As CoA has testified in the past, property taxes pose major financial difficulty for many Connecticut residents, particularly those with limited incomes and resources. Connecticut's municipalities are disproportionately reliant on property taxes to fund education, police and fire and other local services. A number of programs exist to help mitigate the cost of property taxes, including a variety of local tax relief and/or credit programs, as well as the state Circuit Breaker program. These programs help support individuals' desire and intent to remain in their homes and communities as they age, as well as the state's goal of helping individuals to do so.

With this Committee's support, CoA conducted a survey of local programs in 2007; the report of our findings has been presented to the Committee in the past and is available on our web site at www.cga.ct.gov/coa. We encourage you to consider the report's recommendations surrounding information sharing and other reforms of the property tax system.

This bill would provide loans to certain qualified individuals to help them pay their property taxes. These loans would be associated with liens on the homes. We would question the age criteria (age 70) as one of the qualifications, with the consideration that younger individuals might need similar assistance. Additionally, CoA's research has identified the placement of liens as a disincentive to apply for assistance with property taxes; however, liens would provide assurance that the state would receive repayment.

CoA would be pleased to work with this Committee to address numerous issues surrounding property taxes and assistance programs.

Senate Bill 1064: An Act Concerning Notification of Financial Stability of Nursing Home Facilities and Managed Residential Communities to Patients and Residents

~CoA supports

This proposal empowers nursing home and managed residential community residents, potential residents and their families by providing them with information about the facilities' placement into receivership or application for bankruptcy. The Commission on Aging supports all efforts to educate and inform individuals who are seeking long-term care services.

Over the past several years, many skilled nursing facilities in Connecticut have faced financial difficulties. An unprecedented number have been placed into receivership or have faced bankruptcy. When these homes close, residents are uprooted and usually moved to other facilities; this move is disruptive to quality of life and can compromise individuals' health as well.

This type of financial information would be particularly useful for families who have not yet chosen a facility. CoA supports providing this information to all residents and potential applicants.

Senate Bill 1065: An Act Concerning Fear of Retaliation Training in Nursing Homes

~CoA supports

CoA thanks this Committee and Nancy Shaffer, our state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman, for identifying this critical issue. Fear of retaliation is a real issue for residents of nursing homes, who are often afraid to exercise their rights.

Imagine if you were reliant on someone else to schedule your showers, bring your meals and change your sheets. If an issue arose – for example, if you were upset that your medications were wrong or late – you might want to complain, and it would certainly be your right to do so. However, many residents bravely have come forward, indicating that complaining about one issue often has led to them receiving substandard care. Nancy's work with nursing home residents and staff has uncovered that staff are sometimes unaware that they respond in this fashion.

This bill would require staff to be trained and could help reduce staff's tendency to retaliate. CoA believes this type of training would be valuable and not pose a burden for nursing facilities in our state.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. CoA remains available to continue to work on this legislation as necessary throughout the process.